



## BI-WEEKLY HIGHLIGHTS

January 24, 2008

### Nomination for Director of Foreign Assistance Memo

- On January 14 at approximately 6:30pm four attackers armed with Kalishnikovs and grenades attacked Kabul's Serena Hotel, a popular meeting place for international aid workers. Media are reporting that six people died and several were wounded in the attack for which the Taliban claims responsibility. Thor Hesla, a USAID contractor with Bearing Point working on the Capacity Development Program, was killed in the attack. USAID/Afghanistan sends our condolences to his family and the families of victims.

### Security

- On January 5, a convoy including USAID contractor Advanced Engineering Associates International, Inc., traveling on the Kandahar to Kabul ring road, was attacked by an Anti-Government Element (AGE) group. The Guard Force fired back with machine guns and anti-tank rockets and drove the AGE away. There were no injuries but one of the escort vehicles sustained slight damage.

### Office of Alternative Development and Agriculture



- Alternative Development Program/North (ADP/N) continues to facilitate the export of nuts and dried fruit from central Badakhshan. Total sales from the fruit and nut program in Baharak, Jurm, and Shohada are now \$253,870 for the season.
- The 134 beneficiaries of Alternative Development Program/East's Annual Horticulture Programs began selling snow peas, cabbage, beets, and broccoli at a rate of 40,000 per week worth \$14,000. Cumulative sales for the current season surpassed \$132,000. Current estimates suggest that sales have reached \$30,000 per week and are expected to climb until the end of the current harvest in February.
- USAID's Alternative Development Program/South (ADP/S) deployed two Afghan national cash-for-work project managers to the ISAF Forward Operating Base in Musa Quala. USAID is managing worker registration and overseeing payments for a cash-for-work program that is employing hundreds of Afghans every workday. USAID's technical expertise on cash-for-work



has allowed the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to demonstrate their authority in a post-kinetic environment.

- Formal factory operations have begun for the Alternative Livelihoods/East-sponsored Riyaz Packaging Factory, which has the production capacity of 5,000 corrugated and wooden boxes per day, utilizing 31 new full-time employees. These boxes will initially be used for fruit and vegetable exports under the “Pride of the Eastern Region” brand.

## **Office of Democracy and Governance**

- The Asia Foundation signed a lease securing the new interim Media Center for use by the Office of the Presidential Spokesman on January 6. The Center will undergo renovations sponsored by the British before occupancy on or around March 2008. The Center will serve as the strategic communications center for President Karzai.
- USAID sponsored a National Core Curriculum Conference during January 5-8, in Kabul, resulting in an agreement on a core curriculum for law and Sharia law faculties. The conference was a culmination of curriculum discussions held in Kabul and at provincial law and Sharia law faculties in Afghanistan.
- Certificates of completion were issued on January 9 to sixteen government representatives who completed the USAID-sponsored Training Needs Assessment course. The Chairman of the Independent Administration Reform and Civil Service Commission (IARCSC), the Senior Advisor of IARCSC, and TV and radio journalists participated in a certificate distribution ceremony. The certified staff will be assigned to work in various ministries to conduct training needs assessments designed to assist ministries with developing training plans.

## **Office of Economic Growth**

- The Baghlan Investment and Finance Cooperative (IFC), supported by the USAID ARIES credit program, recently completed its distribution of food items to survivors of the November suicide attack in Baghlan, which killed six parliamentarians and more than 50 residents of Baghlan province, including school teachers and students. The assistance, funded through the IFC's Zakat (almsgiving) reserve account, was provided to 163 families who each received 10kg of cooking oil, 25kg of rice, 7kg of beans, 4kg of tomato paste, 7kg of sugar, and 1kg of tea. Additionally, education accounts were established for 99 children directly injured, and development accounts were established for 64 families who lost children. *Note:* IFCs are designed to be Sharia-compliant financial institutions. Zakat, as one of the five pillars of Islam, is an obligation for individuals and institutions. It is a charitable donation given annually to the disadvantaged and poor members of communities.
- USAID's Afghanistan Small and Medium Enterprise Development (ASMED) project sponsored Afghanistan's participation at the South Asian Countries Commodity Trade Fair that was held in Beijing, China from Dec. 28 – Dec 30, 2007. The show was the first of a planned series of such



trade shows and the Afghan booths made a great impression. Twenty Afghan traders from a variety of sectors such as carpets, pomegranates, and stone handicrafts attended the show. ASMED's efforts were coordinated with the Export Promotion Agency of Afghanistan.

- With support from the USAID's Land Titling and Economic Restructuring Activity program, three liquidation auctions were recently held; all three properties were sold at well above the starting price. There were seven bidders for both parcels, indicating that the divestiture program is attracting several investors from the private sector.
- USAID/BearingPoint Appeals and Litigation Team, advising the Afghanistan Customs Department (ACD) in the Ministry of Finance, has provided extensive training on customs law, developed and reviewed new customs procedures, and settled numerous customs cases. By the end of 2007, 320 custom officers were covering more than 20 border posts and entry points across Afghanistan (Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif and Jalalabad). The Team also settled nearly 300 cases between traders and the ACD. The cases ranged from smuggling, corruption, and fraud to improper invoices, certificates of origin and customs storage issues.
- On December 26, the Afghanistan Rural Finance Center (ARFC) signed a loan contract for US\$228,000 with Saleh Marble Factory in Nangarhar Province. The loan funds will be used to purchase equipment and working capital. The factory will purchase a marble cutting machine and expand its current operation to provide additional employment opportunities for more than 120 individuals. As of September 2007, the USAID ARIES program had created more than 14,000 jobs through ARFC and other projects in the Nangarhar province.

### **Provincial Reconstruction Team**

- On December 29, the Deputy Ministers of Mines & Industries and Public Works visited the Task Force Cinnatus area of responsibility and met with the command to discuss the production of minerals in Jabul Siraj and road construction projects in Bamyan, Parwan, and Panjshir provinces.
- During the week of December 30, a conference was held in Jalalabad chaired by IRoA Education Minister and Task Force Bayonet Commander to discuss coordination on education programs for the Eastern region. Minister Haneef Atmar stated that his top priority was expanding teacher training and he asked for assistance with salary support for trainers at teacher training colleges.
- Six USAID-funded rapid response projects in Panjway are currently receiving local contractor bids through USAID implementing partner, DAI. Field Program Officers notified the DAI Program Coordinator that there is a need to identify projects in the Zhari district of Helmand province. Coordination with the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team and Task Force Kandahar is going well and all parties are pleased with the synchronization of efforts.



## **Office of Social Sector Development**

- COMPRI-A, an USAID social marketing project, signed a national distribution agreement with Afghan National Distribution and Warehousing for improving access to and sales of its social marketing products (condoms, oral re-hydration solution, chorine) into more rural and less stable provinces and districts of the country.

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